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Hopkins, Ernest Martin

The college of the future

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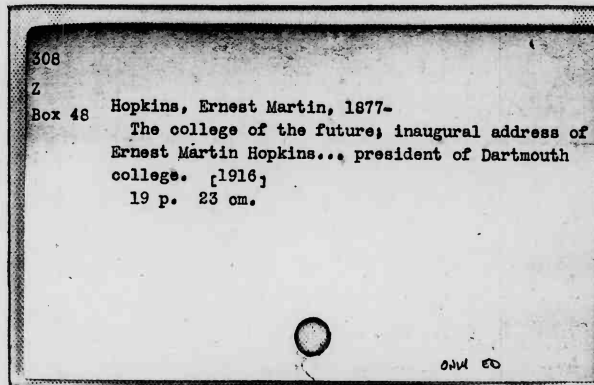
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THE COLLEGE OF THE FUTURE

Inaugural Address of

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THE COLLEGE OF THE FUTURE

*Address delivered by Ernest Martin Hopkins, Litt.D.,
LL.D., on the occasion of his inauguration as
President of Dartmouth College*

*Webster Hall at Dartmouth College, Friday,
October 6, 1916*

College is means to an end. This statement of fact, even if, perchance, it be lacking in originality of conception or novelty of form, is so fundamental to all right thinking in regard to college administration as to demand constant consideration and not infrequent reiteration—and rarely if ever has it required emphasis so insistently as now. If I read aright the purposes of our ancient foundations, or of the devoted lives of those whose work has made our colleges what they are; or if I interpret aright the overwhelming need of times to come, the end is constructive idealism interpreted in terms of service.

Civilization is being shaken to its deepest foundations, and agnosticism is rife in regard to much that has been accepted as axiomatic in life. Many a conclusion has been abandoned that until recently has been held rigidly, and it is yet impossible to know what premises may be established from which the conclusions of the future shall be drawn. We hardly know more than that a great winnowing of human affairs is in process, separating the essential from the incidental and attaching to each its rightful value in symbols that all may read. Matters formerly of little more than speculative interest,—such for instance as those concerned with the conservation of wealth through per-

sonal and national economies,—have all at once become of the most practical concern.

Peoples in convulsion and governments narrowly escaped from death will never resume life on the basis of customs and sufferances extant but so little time ago in our academic calendar, as the freshman year of our seniors now in college. This suddenness with which conditions have changed is matched only by the extent to which they have been transformed. Never has an epoch in the world's history been so plainly differentiated to the men of its generation as is this time in which we live. We stand on the threshold between two eras, and it is given to those of thoughtful minds to comprehend in some measure the significance of this vantage ground.

It has been said that an enduring college always dwells on the mountain top, that its face may first reflect the light of the coming day. As yet we fail to see the dawn, but we can seek to establish ourselves upon the heights and to hold ourselves in readiness for the sun's first gleam. There is no time for sleeping. That which shall come will come quickly at the last, and those things which are to be done will be doubly well done if done on the moment,—and this is no less true for the colleges than for other institutions of mankind. Meanwhile, in the darkness which surrounds us we have consciousness of certain changes which are being wrought.

A wide and rapidly increasing seriousness is abroad in the earth, to the effects of which we as a nation must respond as definitely as we respond to the economic tendencies among numerous peoples or to the policies of statecraft of great governments of the world. It is, moreover, a circumstance of the utmost consequence

that when we, who crave so much for our national life, are called with other nations of the earth to make response to these world tendencies, we must make it without the spiritual uplift or the purification of purpose which is so plainly developing among those nations which have staked all for their ideals. Neither does it appear that we, as a people, are vitally absorbed in carrying through to completion any of those projects so aptly called by Professor James "the moral equivalents of war." Herein for the college are great obligation and great opportunity alike, and upon the contribution which it shall be equipped and prepared to make will depend the relative importance of the college to life at large in years to come.

It is a certainty that such a revaluation of customs and institutions is imminent as has heretofore been unknown; and no sentimental consideration can be expected for such as cannot prove their worth. Under these exigencies the historic college must submit itself, without arrogance, to searching audit; and, as it offers the exhibit of its honorable past, it must show its potentiality for the future. Such a requirement presupposes complete receptivity of mind and a self-respecting humility that makes impossible didactic statements or *ipse dixit* assertions. We who engage ourselves in college work cannot well do more than to review what seem to be the enduring principles of our respective foundations and our subsequent achievements, and attempt to define the spirit and the aspirations with which we approach the overwhelming problems of the future so immediately before us.

It seems probable that the first point at which we shall be called upon to define our attitude is on the contention that all education, to be worth while, must

be made more utilitarian. One finds generally in the English periodicals of the present the argument that classical education is a luxury which has outlived any possible usefulness, and which must go the way of all those other luxuries which have been foregone; and that new obligations and responsibilities can only be met by an education of which every branch shall be designed for direct application to immediate needs. Likewise, there come back to us accounts of meetings of groups of German schoolmasters in the trenches, for instance, where resolutions are adopted to the effect that when the war shall be over these teachers will return to their homes with determination to make the German system of education more practical. These occurrences cannot be dismissed as sporadic. The evidence abounds that the national tendencies in these great nations is in the direction of an educational system of pure utility.

No tribute is fitting, for none is needed, to those institutions of higher learning in our country which have been founded for, and are giving, the vital training of a highly specialized technical curriculum. They have merited, and won, the highest commendation. The liberal colleges, with all other types of educational institution, owe the technical schools a great debt of gratitude for their insistence upon the scientific method in the approach to scholarship, which has had its effect throughout the educational world. We are a wide-spread people, with numberless needs, and we could not do without that which such types of education have afforded. The realm of higher education, however, is of too great area for any kind of institution to occupy it all, and least of any should the traditional cultural college have ambition to attempt it. The

function of the cultural college has proved to be of the utmost importance; its work has been of distinctive service throughout the nation's history; and its future success, in my opinion, will be more marked,—if change is to be made,—by reverting to a curriculum of fewer subjects better taught, than by spreading its efforts constantly thinner until its attitude takes on unfortunate semblance to a sprawl.

It is not likely to be, at any time, that without loss to itself the world can close its mind to the influences of the past. The intuitions for the beautiful and the understanding of the logical which have come down to us from civilizations which have risen and lived their allotted lives are foundations for that appreciation of philosophy, art and literature without which the world would lose its breadth and depth.

There has been no better expression of this belief than is included in the "Memorandum on the Limitations of Scientific Education," issued by a group of Englishmen of world-wide fame, headed by Lord Bryce, and published as a protest against the prevalent propaganda for the monopolization of the field of education in England by technical subjects:

"It is of the utmost importance that our higher education should not become materialistic through too narrow a regard for practical efficiency. Technical knowledge is essential to our industrial prosperity and national safety; but education should be nothing less than a preparation for the whole of life. It should introduce the future citizens of the community not merely to the physical structure of the world in which they live but also to the deeper interests and problems of politics, thought and human life. It should acquaint them, so far as may be, with the capacities and ideals

of mankind, as expressed in literature and in art, with its ambitions and achievements as recorded in history, and with the nature and laws of the world as interpreted by science, philosophy and religion. * * * Some of its most distinguished representatives have strongly insisted that early specialization is injurious to the interests they have at heart, and that the best preparation for scientific pursuits is a general training which includes some study of language, literature and history. Such a training gives width of view and flexibility of intellect. Industry and commerce will be most successfully pursued by men whose education has stimulated their imagination and widened their sympathies.

" * * * What we want is scientific method in all the branches of an education which will develop human faculty and the power of thinking clearly to the highest possible degree.

"In this education we believe that the study of Greece and Rome must always have a large part, because our whole civilization is rooted in the history of these peoples, and without knowledge of them can not be properly understood."

I am emphasizing certain convictions about the older humanities, not from any lack of confidence and belief in the sciences, but simply because the sciences will not be subject to attack in the newer movements in education as will be the humanities. And in regard to those essential subjects of the curriculum which we know as the newer humanities, it is simply to be said that they will be open to much the same sort of attack as has been the older group once the agitation against this latter shall prove successful.

There is no law of physical science to which more

exact analogy can be found in the realm of movements social, economic, philosophical or religious, than that which states action and reaction to be equal and opposite in direction. As one studies the swing of theory from one extreme to another in mental and spiritual realms, he comes to the understanding that the influence of the college on these must be a steadying influence, like the force of gravity on the pendulum, tending constantly to shorten the arc of motion and influencing toward an eventual stable equilibrium. It is for this reason that the college cannot be inherently either radical or conservative, for the same principle which impels it to pull back from one extreme today will tomorrow lead it to endeavor to correct the over-swing of the reaction.

I have said that the college exists as means to an end, and that the end should be constructive idealism interpreted in terms of service. It well may be added that no particular form of service is so vitally essential today as high-minded consecration to the needs of the state. The development of our national life has been shown to be far short of the standard to which it was supposed to have attained, and in many of our attributes we have been proved more a group of peoples than a nation. It remains for the living of our time as truly as for those of the generation of half a century ago to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us, of developing unity and forcefulness of conviction in our national life, that, from the heritage of the past and the needs of the future alike, we take increased devotion to the cause for which such sacrifices have been made and in the success of which we firmly believe humanity to be so much concerned.

To this endeavor the colleges should be committed

by their every instinct and by all the influences which have shaped them; and solemn responsibility rests upon them now that they shall be sensitive to the new note which is beginning to sound in our national affairs, as parochialism becomes less and less a characteristic, and as we come to recognize our inevitable responsibility among the nations of the earth.

The period before us will demand clearly defined national consciousness and forceful leadership of rarest sort if we are to be important agents in the world's trend towards democracy. Mental processes must be clarified and thinking must be less muddled. It will not be a time when the destructive genius of critical analysis will be of maximum worth; and the necessity will exist that the susceptibility of modern college life to this process of thought shall give place to a genuine passion for constructive thinking and constructive planning, which is the only motive under which truly great things are ventured and done. Montaigne's statement still has point,—“The discharge of a present evil is no cure, if there be not general amendment of condition. * * * Whoever proposes only to remove that which offends him falls short; for good does not necessarily succeed evil; another evil may succeed, and a worse.”

Democracy is a very precious thing to us who wish to live our own lives with the minimum of outside interference. But it is possible to defeat the very ends for which it exists if we concede the utmost claims of individualism which have been urged to such extremes. It is important for the college at this point to study the type of its accomplishment and to understand the change which the needs of the immediate future must work in its methods if it is to make its vital contribu-

tion to meet these needs. In training for leadership its influence in years past, unconsciously perhaps, has been to set college men apart in the communities in which they have lived. The requirement now is emphatically the reverse. At a time when, almost without exception, the college man went into a profession, and when the professional man was inevitably a college man, the leadership of the community gravitated towards its advisers, who were the ministers, lawyers, doctors and teachers,—in short, the college men of the community. These men were necessarily individual workers, and it came to be that the stamp of college training, as a matter of course, implied individualism. But whether it be that business and industry began to summon the men from institutions of higher learning, or that college men began to seek careers in the field of production and distribution, the change has been wrought very quickly that the men going into the professions from our colleges are far outnumbered by those seeking the newer career.

Figures prepared at Dartmouth a decade ago show that, for the first twenty-five years of the College, 40 per cent of its graduates entered the ministry; 25 per cent entered the law; 12 per cent entered teaching; 7 per cent entered medicine; 16 per cent were untraceable. For the first fifty years the legal profession led with 36 per cent; the ministry was second with 30 per cent; and only 10 per cent, classed as untraceable, have the possibility of having been outside the professions. In the half decade from 1900 to 1905, 52 per cent of Dartmouth's graduates went into business and industry, and that figure has increased until, from 1909 to 1913, it runs above 60 per cent. Like changes, in varying degree, have been going on in other colleges.

All this requires definite modification of some of the theories about individualism as compared with group action; for coöperation is the basis of accomplishment outside the professions, and in ever increasing degree within them. Thus individualism that either fails of ability or interest to express itself through helpful influence on group action is, at the best, of restricted worth; and, at the worst, is positively pernicious. Individual success attained for selfish ends is an unworthy goal for the colleges to set for their men, but the colleges are not entirely free from indictment on this count. The brilliancy of the halo which has been set about the theory of individualism and all that it implies, in some of our college teaching, has been too often responsible for dulling in the student's mind the conception of the beauty of service. The way must be found to stimulate the desire of our student bodies for supreme service within the group rather than outside it. The inscription in the Worcester County Courthouse, in Massachusetts,—“Here speaketh the conscience of the State, restraining the individual will,”—could well be placed, with slight adaptation, in our academic halls, and made descriptive of one great function of the college.

We have as a people specialized so completely in recent years on claiming rights, that our senses of obligation and responsibility have become atrophied. Authority has been weakened, not only in state and church but in home and school, until it commands less respect even than obedience. Amid all this, somehow, the conviction has begun to grow that dilettante philosophizing about rights, and claims to opportunities which have not been earned offer too little compensation in constructive accomplishment for what society

is called upon to sacrifice in the character of the individuals who compose it, through their being so little called upon to acknowledge any authority of any kind whatsoever.

A proper understanding of the needful limits upon the theory of individualism is important in defining the relations between the college and the undergraduate body. In a large way the college exists for the individual student; but it does not exist so truly for the individual student as for the generation of college men, and it does not exist for either as definitely as for the social group which is the state. It is an easy and a pleasant thing to say to an undergraduate member of the college what properly interpreted is true,—that the institution is established and maintained for his benefit. If, however, application of this statement is interpreted to mean that the college lives to meet his personal convenience or to enhance his personal success, as apart from the needs of society and his ability to contribute to them, wrong is done the man, and the college trust has been maladministered.

The service which the college should render to the nation includes, very definitely, the inculcation of an idea of the value of discipline in the minds of those men who have conferred upon them the advantage of the college endowments. And this cannot well be instilled if the college abjures all responsibility for maintaining a code of discipline. This is one of the vital reasons for the existence of certain standards of intellectual competency and moral inclination for membership in the college. Admittedly, many of these are awkward, and some may be badly designed for the purpose sought; but, even so, they should stand until they can be replaced with methods better devised. This is the

answer that must be made not infrequently to some earnest and loyal friends of the college, who, from the best of intentions, seek to neutralize its standards by reiterated requests that exception be made to regulations of proved worth, and who are prone to contend that all human attributes have disappeared from college teaching and college administration because the avenues to special privilege have been closed. The same reason exists for saying to the undergraduate that his preferences, either concerning modifications of the curriculum or in regard to administrative policy, cannot necessarily prevail unless, in the opinion of the best intelligence derived from experience, such modifications are for the ultimate accomplishment of those ends for which the college exists as a means. Thus, in the not infrequent student query as to what benefit he derives from certain curriculum requirements of non-utility, the attempt should be made to have him understand that the cultural heritage handed down through the ages, and now particularly entrusted to the historic college, is worthy of preservation. But the requirements cannot be abolished even if he remains unconvinced, for the college is more responsible for his ultimate satisfaction than for his immediate contentment.

I recently chanced upon a quotation from the London *Journal of Education* on the relation of education and character, which clearly expresses the thought that is becoming more largely held in regard to our colleges particularly, as well as in regard to education at large:

"To turn out boys with pleasant manners, generous hearts and good animal spirits is not enough; we want boys and girls with trained intelligence, who have been made to use their brains and taught that not to use them

is a sin. * * * Every boy and girl who grows up mindless, ignorant or intellectually undisciplined, is so much dead weight hanging around the neck of the community, and ought to be made to feel it. When we discuss character and education, therefore, let us give the fullest possible meaning to each word."

I believe that it is worthy of more emphasis than has sometimes been given that the development of character is distinctly one of the great responsibilities of the college. The introduction of university methods into college teaching, the influence of professionalized scholarship in the chairs of instruction, and the marked disinclination of men of the present generation to consult together concerning the deeper phases of life have, all together, so altered the once existing relationship between teacher and student that the old-time formative influence of the college faculty on student character has too greatly disappeared. It is still, however, not to be forgotten that our colleges were founded and sustained through years of drastic toil by men of religious fervor, who, in self-sacrifice, literally gave their lives for the perpetuation of institutions designed no less for spiritual inspiration than for intellectual command. Forms of expression change from generation to generation, and manifestations of spiritual instinct differ widely from those of a century-and-a-half ago. But the initial obligation rests upon us to make the college influential in the development of those traits vital to well-proportioned goodness.

Scholarship as a product of the college is incomplete except as it be established on the foundation of character which is not only passively good, but which is of moral fibre definite enough to influence those with whom it is brought into contact. By as much as evil

directed by intelligence is more dangerous than brainless badness, by so much is the college open to the danger of doing the country an ill turn if it ignores its responsibility to safeguard and develop character as it undertakes to stimulate mentality.

The demands which will be made upon the college in the years immediately before us will be insistent and heavy. The knowledge of this compels us to strive with unwonted effort to realize all our resources, and to have all our assets quick assets. There will be few such possibilities of added vigor to the college as in the development of what has come to be known as the alumni movement until, in far greater measure, the solicitude and the intelligence of the alumni,—more truly even than their financial means,—are directed to furthering the true interests of the college.

Such strength as the American college lacks it lacks, in the main, because of the too great confinement of interest among its men to the college of their undergraduate days. Many a man, through lack of opportunity for anything else, draws all the inspiration for his enthusiasm for his college from his memories of life when an undergraduate, and feeds his loyalty solely upon sentimental reverence for the past. The misfortune of interest thus confined falls alike upon the individual and upon the college. In general, the alumni of our American colleges have little knowledge of educational movements or college responsibilities on which to base any interest that they may be disposed to give to the evolution of college thought. It is needless impoverishment for a man to be the recipient of the bounty of his college for the brief season of his membership and thereafter to miss being a participator in its affairs as a going concern.

The ability of Dartmouth to continue to justify its existence in a large way will be greatly increased or seriously curtailed by the degree of willingness of the alumni to seek knowledge of what the function of this College should be, and how its function should be accomplished. Any college which could have the really intelligent interest and coöperation of a large part of its alumni body in working out its destiny to major usefulness would become of such striking serviceableness as to be beyond comparison. I am a great believer in the desirability of organized effort to get every individual alumnus enrolled as a financial contributor, but I believe in this most largely because of my conviction that, as a people, we are so constituted that where a man gives his money he there gives his interest.

There has been no phase of college activity which has been of such personal interest to me as has been the alumni movement; there has been none in which I have believed greater possibilities of good to exist. I am convinced, however, that this movement will fail of major usefulness unless it bases itself, and is based by the college, upon intelligent understanding of the problems which education must face. This movement may indeed become detrimental to any given institution if it accepts the privilege of reviewing college actions without accepting responsibility to review them with the utmost discrimination, and without accepting accountability for opinions which it may express. Knowledge of conditions in the time of a man's own undergraduate course will not be sufficient. He must know the problems of today, and foresee the general characteristics of those of the future, and his efforts at all times must be rigidly to hold the college to its highest ideals. The age of a college is one of the rights

of every undergraduate; but, as truly, to every alumnus should belong the spirit of her eternal youth. It is a recollection to be cherished to know the glorious days that have gone, but our boast is incomplete unless we can say of the present that we crave the privileges and claim a share in the responsibilities of our brotherhood and of our sonship.

In urging that the alumni make a special effort to have their relations with the College based on continuing intimacy of contact I do not forget that a share of the responsibility for developing the alumni movement aright belongs to the College. I give most unqualified support to the attitude already taken by the Trustees of Dartmouth that the request of the Alumni Council of the College for some definition of the educational intent of Dartmouth should be answered in the fullest possible manner. I likewise am very sure that the contribution of the College to its graduates ought to be continued in some more tangible way than exists at present. The tendency of college men to seek careers outside the professions, the tendencies of the professions themselves to become so highly specialized as to necessitate the complete engrossment of thought of the men who follow them, and the ever increasing demand of the age on all, requiring constantly greater intensity of effort and more exclusive utilization of time in men who wish to do their respective shares of the world's work, impose a duty upon the college which formerly belonged to it in no such degree, if at all. Contacts with what we broadly classify as the arts and sciences are less and less possible for men of affairs. In many a graduate the interest in or enthusiasm for these which the college arouses is, therefore, altogether likely to languish, or even die, for lack of sus-

tenance. If the College, then, has conviction that its influence is worth seeking at the expense of four vital years in the formative period of life, is it not logically compelled to search for some method of giving access to this influence to its graduates in their subsequent years! The growing practice of retiring men from active work at ages from sixty-five to seventy, and the not infrequent tragedy of the man who has no resources for interesting himself outside the routine of which he has been relieved, make it seem that the College has no less an opportunity to be of service to its men in their old age than in their youth, if only it can establish the procedure by which it can periodically throughout their lives give them opportunity to replenish their intellectual reserves. It is possible that something in the way of courses of lectures by certain recognized leaders of the world's thought, made available for alumni and friends of the College during a brief period immediately following the Commencement season, would be a step in this direction. Or it may be that some other device would more completely realize the possibilities. It at least seems clear that the formal educational contacts between the College and its graduates should not stop at the end of four years, never in any form to be renewed.

As we approach the demands of the future of the college at this particular stage in the world's history, however, there seems to me a single word of caution which should be uttered. At a period of such violent readjustments, when the values which shall be accorded to things physical, intellectual and spiritual are undergoing so much revision, it is more to be desired that institutions as well as individuals shall safeguard openness of mind than that they shall prejudice future

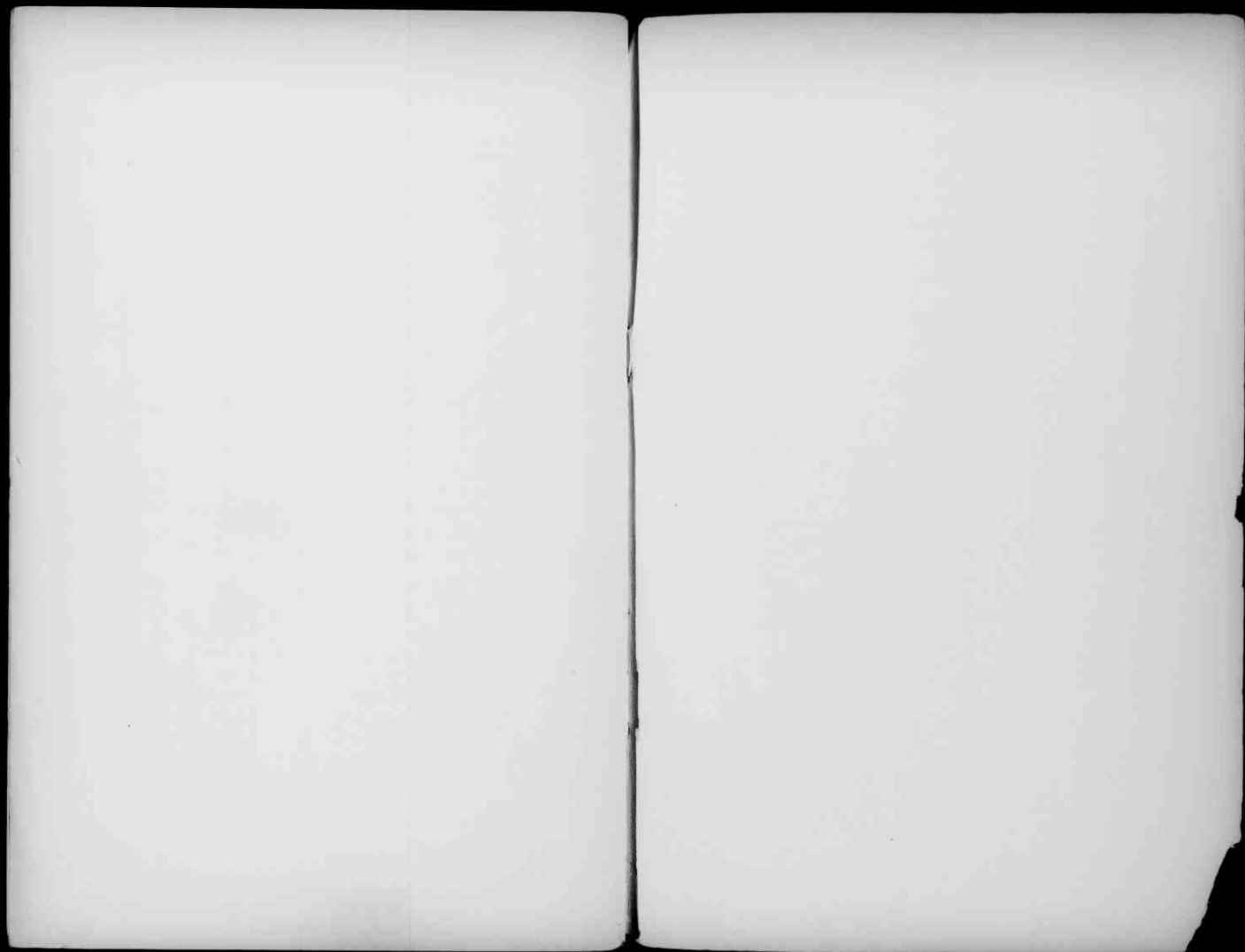
action by the too definite recording of preconceived notions toward which subsequent policies are bound to be bent. We are like travelers over unfamiliar trails, who know the point of the compass along which their way lies, but who are without knowledge as to the exact spot at which they will make their camp.

We cannot reasonably attempt at any specific time to solve the whole problem of the relations of the college to a future whose needs we do not know. We should rather recognize the general attributes of our task and attempt to define the spirit in which the college shall make its approach to them. The college has always stood for fullness of life for the individual and has thus by indirection benefited the group. It must from now on, to such extent as it has not done before, have, as its first aim, fullness of life for the group, depending for this largely upon the advantage it can afford the individual. The practical operation may not be so very different in the one case from what it has been in the other, but the modification of motive will be one of those intangible but vastly important influences which will be certain to have much to do with the quality of the spiritual product of the college.

A little less than a century and a half ago Eleazar Wheelock, fired with a great missionary impulse, fared forth into a physical wilderness, overcoming difficulties, offsetting lack of acquaintanceship with his new environment and rising superior to discouragement, and here, in the forest-clad plain of Hanover, reapplied those principles of education, of religion and of service to country and to God for which he had laid the foundations in a land of security and comfort. It is the propulsion of this spirit down through the decades that

has resulted in the Dartmouth that we, her sons, so love and reverence.

Today we are summoned forth along uncharted ways into the mazes of a changed life, of a rapidly transforming world. We are summoned into a wilderness of thought. May we not pray with faith that under the guidance of God, working from principles that are among the verities, we may give effectually the service most needed to add depth to the shallows of life, breadth to the straitened places of mind, and height to the lowlands of character! Thus, in truth, shall we be justified in the new life, as we have been in the old, and continuingly we can claim the ancient motto of the College,—*Vox clamantis in deserto*.



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